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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5266
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RHMFISS/USCENTCOM SPECIAL HANDLING MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002896

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/24/2024

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: KRG PRESIDENT BARZANI WILLING TO COOPERATE ON
ELECTION LAW

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gray Grappo for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a meeting with the Ambassador's Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq, Kurdistan Regional President (KRG) Masoud Barzani expressed his commitment to working with the U.S. and the GOI on a draft election law. He pledged flexibility regarding the terms, but firmly expressed his disapproval of an arrangement involving a proportional allocation of seats for Kirkuk, which he deemed "unconstitutional." He dismissed allegations that the KRG had relocated 600,000 Kurds to the province of Kirkuk to effect demographic change (a charge commonly made by Kirkuki Arabs and Turkomans), and said he would welcome a parliamentary delegation to Erbil to discuss the election law. Barzani was cordial in emphasizing shared goals and a willingness to cooperate, and firm in pushing back against seat allocation, but stopped short of saying the KRG would not discuss or consider it. The Embassy will maintain close contact with Barzani as we work to facilitate an acceptable election law. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador's Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq, Alan Misenheimer, met with KRG President Masoud Barzani in Erbil on October 24. Barzani reiterated his commitment to closely coordinate with the Kurdish Alliance List (KAL) bloc in Parliament and stressed his desire to work with the U.S. in achieving an acceptable compromise on an election law. He is willing to accept a proposal calling for the establishment of special committees to review voter registration lists, so long as it is an "honest" process and the committee's work is not limited to Kirkuk alone. (Note: KAL members have raised concerns about unusually large increases in the number of registered voters in Ninewa, Diyala, Anbar, Karbala and Basra. End note.) Barzani said the KRG would welcome any inquiry into allegations of abuse in Kirkuk by Kurdish Assayesh or Peshmerga forces. Claiming that it would "be impossible to conceal even 600,000 swallows in Kirkuk, much less people," he dismissed claims by Arabs and Turkomans that the KRG had moved hundreds of thousands of Kurds into Kirkuk to effect demographic change.

¶3. (C) Barzani rejected a proposal to negotiate an allocation of parliamentary seats along ethnic lines for Kirkuk with some emotion. Such an approach, he argued, would infringe on the voters' right to choose candidates and parties, was unconstitutional and "creates a new problem instead of solving an old one." He reiterated several times the familiar view that it is the Sunni Arab groups who insist on seat allocation as a means to foreclose possibility of compromise on an election law and forestall the election. The Senior Advisor underscored several times the need for maximum flexibility on the modalities of the election law. Barzani said he wanted to keep in direct contact with the U.S. as debate over the law progresses in the Political Council for National Security (PCNS). (Note: The PCNS met late October 25 and decided to refer the election law to the Presidency Council, which comprises the president, the two vice

presidents, the Prime Minister, the two deputy prime ministers, the Speaker of the Parliament and his two deputy speakers. End note.) While expressing skepticism that the Arabs would accept compromise, he carefully avoided saying the Kurdish side would not discuss seat allocation at all.

¶4. (C) The Senior Advisor appealed to Barzani to send a Q4. (C) The Senior Advisor appealed to Barzani to send a Kurdish delegation to Baghdad to keep the channels of dialogue open with the U.S. and the GOI. On the question of a COR delegation to visit Kurdistan, Barzani said he was puzzled by the telegram he received from the Deputy House Speaker informing him that House Speaker Ayad al-Samarra'ie "has the intention" to send a delegation to discuss the election law with him. Barzani said that the telegram did not indicate when the delegation would come. Barzani commented that he found the vague communication odd, and clearly doubted that any delegation will come, but also stressed that he would welcome a discussion of the issue with any delegation.

¶5. (C) Comment: With Barzani's Kurdish Alliance List partner, President Talabani, in Baghdad to chair the PCNS, the Kurds have positioned themselves well to shape ongoing negotiations over the election law. Barzani studiously avoided rejecting altogether the possibility of a compromise involving a seat allocation component; however, his message and demeanor suggested that getting him to accept such a formulation would require significant pressure - and possibly tangible inducements. End Comment.

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